House Votes 280-65 to Probe Kennedy, King Assassinations

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The House creased a select committee yesterday to investigate the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The 12-member committee, established on a 280-to-65 vote, will be haeded by Rep. Thomas Downing (D-Va.) for the remainder of this Congress. Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) said. Downing, however, is retiring, and Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), with Downing a prime sponsor of the committee, is expected to become chairman in the new session next January.

Downing said he would ask for $250,000 to get the committee started and hire staff, but Rep. Frank Thompson (D-N.J.), chairman of the House Administration Committee which must authorize the funds, indicated yesterday he might be reluctant to approve that amount.

Because the select committee expires at the end of this yar and will have to be re-established by the House next year, it should wait until then for funding, Thompson said.

Downing said the committee would not hold public hearings before the Nov. 2 elections, to avoid charges of capitalizing politically on the investigation, but he said it might hold some closed hearings "in order to preserve testimony."

Reasons for looking again at the 1963 kennedy assassination, he said, are revelations by the congressional intelligence committees that information about CIA attempts to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro was withheld from the Warren commission, the murder of two Mafia members enlisted by the CIA to help assassinate Castor, and the destruction o notes on Kennedy's autopsy and a note by assassin Lee Harvey Oswald to a member of the FBI.

The commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren investigated the assassination of Kennedy in Dallas and concluded that Oswald acted alone.

But Downing said yesterday, "I am convinced there was a conspiracy involved. I do not know the identity of the conspirators or their motives. That should be investigated in depth."

Downing promised "to engage in no witch-hunts" and "not blame those who may have made mistakes in the original investigation."

Rep. B. F. Sisk (D-Calif.) called the planned investigation a waste of taxpayers' money to satisfy "the melodramatic desire of the morbid to create an incident."

Though Downing and Gonzalez set out more than a year ago to create the committee, they were going nowhere until they received a push from members o the Congressional Black Caucus, who felt they had received "new information" in the 1968 killing of Martin Luther King Jr. that called for a congressional investigation.

D.C. Del. Walter Fauntroy and Rep. Yvonne Burke (D-Calif.) confirmed that the information came from writer and TV producer Abby Mann, who is working on a documentary on King's death, and from writer Mark Lane, one of the first to doubt the Warren Commission conclusions.

Reportedly, the information has been known since 1968 but never investigated by the FBI.

It deals with the removal of King's black security chief from his side shortly before he was killed in Memphis, and the sudden transfer of two black firemen from the firehouse across the street from the motel where King was staying and was shot.

Edward Redditt, in charge of security for King, was ordered to go home about 4 p.m. on the day of King's death, because of a reported attempt on the life of Redditt's family.

The order was atributed to Memphis Fire and Police Director Frank C. Holloman, who has worked for the FBI for 25 years, part of the time in the office of the late Director J. Edgar Hoover, who had tapped King's phone and ordered sufveillance of the civil rights leader.

Floyd Newsum, one of the black firemen abruptly transferred from the fire station across from the motel, said he had attended a King rally in Memphis and, though he publicly told of the transfer at the time, says he was never interviewed by the FBI.